



#### **-News-**

The Auckland Writers and Readers Festival was a huge success and I hope many of you were able to see at least one of the superb events. Sharleen, Sylvia and I went to the opening event and heard readings from Thomas Keneally, Emily Perkins, Colm Toibin, Lionel Shriver and William Dalrymple. What amazing talent, and for me Lionel Shriver was the absolute rock-star of the evening. Her reading was superb. Toibin's reading was beautiful and Dalrymple's reading of a "lost in translation" moment in India was a wonderful way to end the evening. I then went back the following night with some friends to hear William Dalrymple again and he did not disappoint. It was also fun to sit and watch the rich and/or famous as they sat in the allocated front seats! I seem to have been back on track with reading and been able to get through some excellent books. The Help continues to race out the door as our most popular book. Jamie Oliver has another superb new cookbook out. The Fancy Nancy, Wonky Donkey and Piggity Wiggity Jiggity Jig children's picture books are an easy choice for children.

#### **-Book Reviews-**

***Chef* by Jaspreet Singh** – Kirpal Singh is on a slow train to Kashmir. As he travels, he reflects on his destination: a military camp to which he has not returned for fourteen years. Kirpal is young and shy when he arrives for the first time at General Kumar's camp, and becomes an apprentice under head chef Kishen, who tries to guide him in the ways of the world. As a Sikh, Kirpal feels secure in his allegiance to India, until a beautiful so-called Pakistani terrorist is washed up on the banks of the river. "Mesmeric, mournful, and intensely lyrical, *Chef* is a brave and compassionate debut about hope, love, and memory set against the devastatingly beautiful, war-scarred backdrop of occupied Kashmir."

***Ransom* by David Malouf** – This stunning novel focuses on the unbreakable (and sometimes unbearable) bonds between men - Priam and Hector, Patroclus and Achilles, Priam and the cart-driver hired to retrieve Hector's body. Pride, grief, brutality, and love are the themes Malouf explores so masterfully. I loved, loved, loved this small but perfectly formed novel!

***The Art Of Racing In The Rain* by Garth Stein** – If you're a dog-lover, you'll love this book. Even if you only like dogs vaguely, I think you'll also love this book! Enzo knows he is different from other dogs as he has watched enough television to educate himself and by listening carefully to his owner, Denny who is an up-and-coming race-car driver. Enzo's dream is to come back in his next life as a human and he would certainly have a better understanding of human life than most of us. As his health fails, Enzo looks back at his life as a member of Denny's family – through the loss of Eve, Denny's wife; the custody battle for Denny's daughter Zoe, and Denny's on-again, off-again driving career. Enzo has been the glue that has held Denny's life together and this wonderful story had me weeping into my tissues (again!).

***The Solitude of Prime Numbers* by Paolo Giordano** – This is a beautiful book which is a coming-of-age novel about two lonely children who had traumatic incidents in their childhoods. Alice had a skiing accident, broke her leg and is forever labeled a cripple because of her limp. Mattia, meanwhile, abandoned his mentally retarded twin sister in a park and she disappeared. Giordano traces the next 24 years of their lives: their dislocation from society, their discomfort with their overbearing or overly solicitous parents, their distance from school friends and even from each other. Part of the success of this book comes from its minimalism. It all makes for a melancholic, but strangely beautiful, read.

***The Thousand Autumns Of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell** - As each new David Mitchell novel appears, more readers come to appreciate his extraordinary imagination and ability as a storyteller. One of our local book-clubs voted his last novel, "Cloud Atlas", their favourite book of 2008, and it continues to sell well, as people recommend it to one another. Here is his new one, set in Japan in 1799, when the Japanese Empire has been in self-imposed isolation for a century and a half. No-one may leave, no-one may enter. The sole point of contact with the outside world is through very limited trading with the Dutch East Indies Company at the port of Nagasaki, closely monitored and controlled by the Shogun's officials. But human interaction is not so easy to prevent, even in this feudal stronghold, and this is a fabulous tale of corruption, greed, power, love and death. Highly recommended! (Sylvia)

***The Hand That First Held Mine* by Maggie O'Farrell** – As you may have realized, I am a fan of Maggie O'Farrell and I was not disappointed with this, her new book. It is set in Soho in the Fifties and London half a century later. In the fifties, this is the story of a bored graduate, Lexie Sinclair, and a flamboyant older man, Innes Kent. Innes employs Lexie as an assistant on his avant-garde arts magazine. When circumstances abruptly change, Lexie becomes a groundbreaking journalist, single mother and free spirit. In present-day London, Elina, a laid-back Finnish artist in her early thirties, is struggling to regain a sense of self after the traumatic birth of her son, Jonah. Just as Elina is recovering, her partner, Ted, a filmmaker, begins to have a breakdown. Flashbacks and inexplicable panic attacks escalate, and his complicated interactions with his own parents become strained and confused, as the arrival of Jonah causes him to question his own origins. Once again, I was engrossed by this very clever author.

***The Book Of Lost Threads* by Tess Evans** – This gorgeous winter warm fuzzy read has just arrived in store. We often get women in the shop who want a recommendation for a book that isn't too literary, and will make them smile and feel good. At The Village Bookshop we have our favourites that have had a 100% success rate – "Let Me Sing You Gentle Songs", "Lottery", "Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society" and "The Help". I hope to add this book to that list! Four people come together in a small town in rural Victoria called Opportunity. We have Finn who has become a recluse as he tries to come to terms with an old tragedy. There is Lily, his 83 year old neighbour (my favourite character) who knits tea cosies for the United Nations. Then we have Sandy, Lily's nephew who is known as the town buffoon. Finally there is Moss, who arrives in search of her father Finn who she's never met. The story brings these four mismatched characters together in a beautiful and healing way. Light the fire, put the kettle on, tuck up with your favourite blanket and enjoy this lovely read. As a bonus, for everyone who purchases this book, you will go into the draw for one of my hand-knitted Christian Dior tea cosies – my new passion after reading this book. (Sharleen)

***The Lake Shore Limited* by Sue Miller** – This is the second book by Sue Miller that I have read and once again, she has gently uncovered the buried emotions of her characters. Leslie, her husband Pierce, and their friend Sam all go to see a new play, written by Billy. Billy is the former girlfriend of Leslie's brother Gus, who died in 9/11. The play stirs up emotions for both Leslie and Sam as they look back at their lives and wonder where they would be if they had done things differently. "A powerful love story; a mesmerizing tale of entanglements, connections and inconsolable losses".

***Beautiful Malice* by Rebecca James** – Last month Tracey mentioned a new teenage read that had just been released in New Zealand and Australia. The author has been predicted to be the next J K Rowling or Stephanie Meyer but without the wizards or vampires. Beautiful Malice is an intense, addictive, psychological thriller. If any of you have teenage girls, then this is the book for them, and of course, there is nothing from stopping you from reading it either. I read it in a day – I just couldn't put it down. It is easy to read, except for the uncomfortable chapter of a traumatic murder. However this would give a teenager some insight into the harmful effect of too much alcohol and spiked drinks. This story revolves around Katherine, who has moved to Sydney to escape a family trauma. She tries to be anonymous and manages this until she is befriended by the charismatic Alice. They quickly become best friends but unfortunately there is a dark side to Alice who has a hidden agenda. She is seductive and threatening and the book comes to a devastating finale. When I finished this book I felt like I had been put through the ringer! (Sharleen)

**Monsters Of Men** by Patrick Ness – Finally – the last in the Chaos Walking Trilogy. Monsters of Men did not disappoint. The book starts with three armies marching on New Prentisstown – each are intent on destroying the others. Todd and Viola are caught in different armies and have to find a way of brokering peace. Lots of twists and turns make this a real page-turner and fans of the series will love it. The ending was superb and only leaves me disappointed that there will be no more of Todd and Viola, Mayor Prentiss, Mistress Coyle, Angharrad and all the other characters I have come to love or love to hate!

So the rain has finally arrived, and now we're sick of it! It's time for us to give the shop a thorough clean – it always shocks me to see how much dust, grit and grime accumulates on the shelves and under the furniture. Josh, the cat from Matakana House Tavern, has been popping in for a little time out on the sofa and is always made a fuss of. Where was he when we had a wee mouse in the storage room?! Can't believe we're heading into June – once again, the year is zipping past and I can't keep up with all the books I want to read. Perhaps with colder weather on the way I'll get more reading time. I hope you will too!

Tracey, Sharleen and Sylvia

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